

In this lecture, we will learn:

- The definition of applied linguistics
- The major fields of applied linguistics

## *What is ‘applied linguistics’?*

Applied linguistics is a branch of linguistics where the primary concern is the application of the linguistic theories, methods and findings to the explanation of language problems which have arisen in other areas of experience.

However, if we would like to talk about applied linguistics, we have to know that it is difficult to define; it has been considered a subarea of linguistics for several years. It has also been generally interpreted to mean the applications of linguistic principles or theories to certain more or less linguistic practical matters such as second language teaching, teaching of reading, composition and language arts, speech therapy, speech disorders etc.

To put it differently, applied linguistics uses information from sociology, anthropology, and information theory as well as from linguistics in order to develop its own theoretical models of language and language use, and then uses this information and theory in practical areas such as syllabus design, speech therapy, language planning, literacy, and bilingualism.

To define what applied linguistics is, we have to examine two terms: linguistics and language. As for linguistics, it is usually defined as “the scientific study of language”. In other words, it tries to study language from a scientific point of view with the aim of establishing language as a scientific phenomenon with its own distinctive rules, theories, description...etc.

As for language, there are dozens of definitions of language, the easiest of which is “language is a set of signals by which people communicate”. This definition contains three important words: signals, people and communication. Signals mean that language employs signals (i.e. sound, letters, punctuation marks...) to establish communication between people.

The importance of the word people lies in the fact that linguists and scientists discovered that almost all beings have their distinctive language that might be clear as in the signal language used by bees, ants and dolphins. However, human language is different from these “primitive” languages in two aspects: it is always capable of change and development and it is very sophisticated.

## *What is language ?*

However, it is important to point out that the different definitions of language imply the following facts:

- Language is systematic – possibly a generative system.
- Language is a set of arbitrary symbols.
- Those symbols are primarily vocal, but may also be visual.
- The symbols have conventionalized meanings to which they refer.



- Language is used for communication.
- Language operates in a speech community or culture.
- Language is essentially human, although possibly not limited to humans.
- Language is acquired by all people in much the same way – language and languages learning both have universal characteristics.

Some linguists tried to draw the bounds that separate applied and theoretical linguistics:

Politzer (1972):

He discussed applied linguistics with particular reference to Foreign Language Teaching. He noted that applied linguistics in Foreign Language Teaching requires the use of linguistics to formulate assumptions about Foreign Language Teaching and learning and also to devise teaching procedures based on these assumptions “linguistics is the source of assumptions rather than the source of conclusions”.

Applied linguistics is not a finite body of knowledge that can be acquired, it is ultimately a habit, a way of using linguistics conceptualization to define and solve pedagogical problems.

So, for Politzer , then there is a definable area called “linguistics” and applied linguistics is simply the process of formulating possible solutions to specific (pedagogical) problems using linguistic theory.

Pap (1972):

He discussed applied linguistics beyond language teaching and concludes that applied linguistics may in effect be considered a crossroads or an interdisciplinary area, or a combination of linguistics with psychology, pedagogy, mathematics, electronics, politics, science and so forth. Thus he stresses the interdisciplinary nature of applied linguistics.

Corder (1973):

He, in reaction to the British usage of the term applied linguistics as synonymous with language teaching, points out that “while applied linguistics and language teaching may be closely associated, they are not one and the same activity”.

## *What are the fields of applied linguistics?*

First of all, we have to know that linguistics, in all its varieties, is a relatively new and growing discipline still in search of stable philosophical foundations and boundaries.

A classical classification of linguistics divides linguistics into two major categories:

- 1- Pure ‘theoretical’ linguistics
- 2- Applied linguistics

The major fields of applied linguistics include the following:

- 1- The linguistic analysis of language disorders (clinical linguistics).
- 2- The use of language in mother-tongue education (educational linguistics).
- 3- The developments in lexicography, translation and stylistics.
- 4- The teaching and learning of foreign languages.